



Morning Alert - Thursday, December 8, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report on the 75th anniversary today of the Pearl Harbor attack by the Japanese military. Other top news included reports that Yokohama Mayor Hayashi officially said for the first time that it would be difficult to use Yokohama Arena for the Tokyo Olympics since the volleyball association is against it, and reports that Yoshinori Osumi, who won this year's Nobel Prize in physiology or medicine, held a press conference in Stockholm on Wednesday ahead of the award ceremony.

Lead items in national papers included a Japan-Russia 2+2 meeting to be held in Moscow early next year, a likely accord between Japan and Russia to expand the scope of visa-free travel by Japanese visitors to the Northern Territories, and a blue-ribbon commission's plan to recommend that the GOJ establish a special measures law to allow Emperor Akihito to abdicate.

INTERNATIONAL

Obama comments on Abe's visit to Pearl Harbor

Yomiuri took up President Obama's statement on the 75th Anniversary of the Attack on Pearl Harbor, in which he commented on his plan to visit the USS Arizona with Prime Minister Abe in late December. The President said: "As a testament that even the most bitter of adversaries can become the closest of allies, I look forward to visiting the Arizona Memorial along with Prime Minister Abe. This historic visit will stand as a tribute to the power of reconciliation and to the truth that the United States and Japan—bound by an alliance unimaginable 75 years ago—will continue to work hand-in-hand for a more peaceful and secure world."

Trump pleased with Softbank CEO's plan for massive investment in U.S.

All papers gave prominent inside-page coverage to President-elect Trump's meeting in New York on Tuesday with Softbank CEO Son, during which the Japanese IT mogul announced his plan to invest \$50 billion to create 50,000 jobs in the U.S. Pointing out that the President-elect appears to have "outdated" views on Japan, Yomiuri quoted a GOJ source as saying: "If Trump listens directly to Japanese businesses' positions on the American market and gets a good impression, his views toward Japan will change." Several papers expressed qualms about the next U.S. leader's making overtures to individual companies for retaining jobs and investment in America.

Abe, Putin to agree on expanded travel to Northern Territories by Japanese

Yomiuri wrote in its top story that Russia will agree to host more Japanese visitors to the Northern Territories when President Putin meets with Prime Minister Abe in Japan next week. Businesspeople, developers, and possibly tourists will be added to the current list of selected people, including journalists and those born in the contested territories, who are permitted to visit there without visas. This step is intended to realize the proposed "joint economic activities" on the four disputed islands.

Japan, Russia to hold 2+2 meeting for first time in three years

Sankei led with the disclosure by several GOJ sources that Abe and Putin are likely to agree on arranging a bilateral defense and foreign ministerial meeting in Moscow early next year with the goal of holding China's advancement in the Arctic in check. In the planned 2+2 session, the two sides are expected to agree on expanding bilateral military training and launching discussions on the signing of an acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA). The paper quoted a GOJ source as saying: "An agreement on the 2+2 meeting will send a powerful message to China."

Japan, Iran hold foreign ministerial meeting

All papers reported that Foreign Minister Kishida held talks with his visiting Iranian counterpart yesterday and pledged to contribute 2.05 million euros to assist Tehran in implementing the nuclear agreement with the U.S. and five other nations. The money will be paid through the IAEA for Iran to operate atomic power plants safely.

China calls for Abe to visit Nanjing

Asahi reported on press remarks on Wednesday by a Chinese Foreign Minister spokesperson, who commented on Prime Minister Abe's planned tour of Pearl Harbor by saying that the Japanese leader should make a corresponding gesture toward China by visiting Nanjing and other locations. The official said: "If Japan would like to express deep remorse and offer sincere apologies, we can propose many locations," including a facility displaying materials related to the Nanjing massacre.

SECURITY

U.S., Japanese defense chiefs reconfirm importance of alliance

Most Wednesday evening papers reported on visiting Secretary of Defense Carter's meeting with Defense Minister Inada. They affirmed the importance of the bilateral alliance and agreed to maintain close security cooperation. The two agreed to expedite bilateral discussions on narrowing the scope of the civilian component to be covered by the SOFA. Secretary Carter confirmed that the Senkaku Islands fall under the scope of the Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty during their meeting. The two officials discussed ways to reduce the base-hosting burden on Okinawa and confirmed the plan to return to Japan some 4,000 hectares of land at the Northern Training Area on Dec. 22. In a joint press conference afterward, Inada pledged Japan's continued efforts to strengthen the bilateral alliance, while Carter noted the alliance has become one of the longest enduring alliances.

In follow up reports, most papers said the two officials underscored the strong security partnership between the U.S. and Japan because the incoming Trump administration's Asia policy remains uncertain. Yomiuri wrote that since Secretary of Defense-designate Mattis apparently has little expertise in Asia, the GOJ hopes to call for the next U.S. administration's understanding for the significance of the trans-Pacific alliance by holding dialogue with the transition team.

U.S. military aircraft crashes off Shikoku

All papers reported in their city news sections that a U.S. FA-18 Hornet crashed off the coast of Kochi on Wednesday evening, noting that search and rescue operations to locate the missing pilot involving several SDF planes and ships were still going on at midnight.

Osprey seen flying above residential area of Okinawa with object suspended below

Wednesday evening's Tokyo Shimbun gave top play to a report that an MV-22 Osprey was seen flying over a residential area in the village of Ginoza, Okinawa, with an object suspended below it on a cable for training from around noon until after 9 p.m. on Tuesday. The Okinawa Prefectural Government lodged a protest by saying the training could have caused a serious accident. Okinawa Defense Bureau Director General Nakajima filed a protest with the local Marines authorities and stressed that such training activities cannot be tolerated.

Suga meets with Ginowan leader

Several dailies wrote that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga held talks on Wednesday with Ginowan Mayor Sakima, who asked the GOJ to step up its lobbying of the incoming Trump administration so as to realize the return of MCAS Futenma at an early date. Suga said in reply: "The reversion is a promise made between the central government and Okinawa. It will not change even under the new U.S. administration."

POLITICS

Opposition reacts strongly to LDP plan to enact casino bill tomorrow

All papers reported on the start of deliberations at the Upper House yesterday on the legislation to legalize casinos, noting that the Democratic Party and Japanese Communist Party rejected an LDP proposal on putting the bill to a vote at the Cabinet Committee today after holding six hours of debate for enactment on Friday. The opposition side insisted on much longer deliberations, including a hearing with opinion leaders and casino experts. The papers said it remains uncertain whether the LDP will be able to put the bill to a vote today since the committee is chaired by a DP lawmaker who said Lower House deliberations on the bill have been “insufficient.”

In a related development, all papers reported that the casino legislation was a major topic in yesterday’s one-on-one debate at the Lower House between Prime Minister Abe and DP President Renho, who criticized the administration for pushing ahead with the bill without fully addressing concerns such as gambling addiction. The premier stressed that casinos are just one important feature of the “integrated resorts” that will encourage investments and create jobs.

Abe confident of public support

Mainichi took up remarks made to a senior LDP official on Wednesday by Prime Minister Abe, who said: “My approval rate cannot go any higher in a democracy.” Pointing out that the latest Kyodo opinion survey put support for the premier at 61%, the daily speculated that such a high level of support may prompt Abe to dissolve the Lower House in the near future for a snap election.

In a related piece, Sankei claimed in a front-page story that the premier has chosen not to dissolve the lower chamber this year in order to concentrate on diplomacy, including the upcoming summit with President Putin and visit to Pearl Harbor. Noting that Abe may be hesitant to call a snap election early next year because several media outlets have projected that the LDP would lose a large number of seats in a general election if four opposition parties led by the Democratic Party choose to deepen their electoral cooperation, the paper said Abe may not dissolve the lower chamber until next autumn.